



# Oak Park Elementary School District 97

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## News

### Update Regarding School Closings and End of the 2014-15 School Year

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January 9, 2015

Dear District 97 Community:

I realize the frigid weather that descended upon the area this week created a number of challenges for our community. I want to thank you for the incredible patience and understanding you exhibited throughout this ordeal. I also want to express my appreciation for the thoughtful feedback some of you provided regarding the decision to cancel classes and after school activities during the past two days.

Several of you have asked about the factors we consider and process we follow when determining whether to close school due to inclement weather. In terms of the factors, there are several we carefully consider when faced with a weather emergency. They include, but are not limited to, the total amount of precipitation, the temperature, the timing of a storm, and the condition of the streets and sidewalks.

As for the process, we:

- Closely monitor the forecast and assess the conditions of our buildings and school grounds.
- Engage in an ongoing dialogue with community partners such as the Village of Oak Park and districts 90 and 200.
- Evaluate our capacity to provide vital services under the conditions that exist (transportation, food service, etc.)

In the case of extreme temperatures, such as the ones we faced this week, our threshold for canceling school is a forecast for wind chills in the range of 25 below zero or worse. Under those conditions, frostbite is estimated to set in within 15 minutes of exposure to the elements. This poses a serious threat to students who walk to our buildings on a daily basis, including some who live as far away as a mile from school and others who may not have the clothes (coats, hats, gloves, boots, etc.) necessary to protect them from the cold.

We also have more than 1,400 students who take the bus every day. When we talked to representatives from our transportation provider on Wednesday and Thursday, they informed us they were having difficulty with buses “cutting out,” which likely would have led to delays. The company is currently working to address the mechanical issues that impact their diesel-fueled vehicles in frigid weather.

We did consider going with a delayed start yesterday. However, we felt that doing so would present its own set of challenges for many of our families, especially those with working parents/guardians. In the end, regardless of how complex a situation may be, our primary goal when making any school-related decision has been and always will be to do what is best for our nearly 6,000 students.

As we look ahead to the end of the school year, we are required by law to be in session a minimum of 176 days. We are also required by law to make up any of the five emergency days we are mandated by the state to factor into our school calendar. With this in mind, we have studied and discussed the options that are available for making up the two emergency days we used this week. These options included reducing the length of spring break, canceling our January 16 Institute Day (state requires a minimum of four Institute Days per school year), holding school during one or more of the remaining holidays or extending the end of the school year as we have done in the past.

After reviewing all of these options and consulting with various entities on this issue, including the Illinois State Board of Education, we have decided to move the end of the school year to Thursday, June 4. We realize that this decision may impact people's summer plans, and apologize for any inconvenience it might cause. However, when we evaluated the available solutions, we determined that this one presented the fewest number of programmatic, financial and/or scheduling challenges for everyone involved.

As for eighth grade graduation, we have decided not to move the date or alter any of the planned activities. The ceremonies for Brooks and Julian will be held as scheduled on Tuesday, June 2 at Oak Park and River Forest High School. June 2 will also serve as the last day of school for our eighth graders. While we realize this decision may ultimately impact our General State Aid as it relates to student attendance, we believe any attempt to switch both the date and location at this juncture would be unfair to the hundreds of families who made their plans for this special occasion months ago.

Lastly, there is a chance we may encounter additional weather-related disruptions as the school year progresses. If we do need to take additional days off due to an unforeseen circumstance, the latest we anticipate our school year will end is Tuesday, June 9. This is because we only have three emergency days remaining. After that, we are allowed by the state to categorize other closures due to “conditions beyond the control of the district that poses a hazardous threat to the health and safety of the students” as “Act of God Days.”

Thank you again for your time and attention on this matter, as well as your support of our schools and the children we serve.

Sincerely,

Al Roberts  
Superintendent